

EUROPEAN COMMISSION
 DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY
 Directorate G - Veterinary and International affairs
 Director

Brussels,
 SANTE G3/BB/ap D(2015)5675016

Dear Petitioner,

Subject: The welfare of farmed rabbits

Commissioner Andriukaitis asked me to thank you for your letter registered on 12.11.2015 and to reply on his behalf as the director responsible for animal welfare in the Directorate General for Health and Food Safety. In your letter you support the campaign of Compassion in World Farming (CIWF) to ban the use of cages for rabbits farmed for the purpose of meat or fur production.

The Council Directive 98/58/EC¹ lays down rules for keeping of all animals for farming purposes. Thus, the owners and keepers shall take all reasonable steps to ensure the welfare of animals under their care and to ensure that those animals are not caused any unnecessary pain, suffering or injury². In this context the Annex to the Directive sets out general rules concerning *inter alia* freedom of movement, buildings and accommodation, equipment, feed and water. The Commission is aware of the development of codes of good practice by some of the main producers in the EU based in France, Germany or Belgium.

The goal of increasing the knowledge of animal welfare practices is an important priority for the Commission together with the proper training of the persons responsible for animals from farm level to slaughter. Working with all relevant stakeholders is in this context essential. In the framework of the Better Training for Safer Food program (BTSF), the Commission has organised several training initiatives for the veterinary officials of the Member States that are responsible for the enforcement of the EU law.

As you may be aware, the *EU animal welfare strategy 2012-2015*³ where these principles are described will soon come to an end. It has been decided to complete all the tasks mentioned in the Strategy by the end of 2017. Furthermore, the Commission will continue to highly prioritise enforcement of EU legislation.

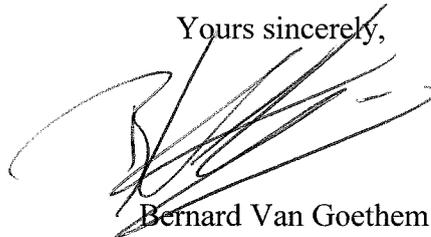
¹ Council Directive 98/58/EC concerning the protection of animals kept for farming purposes; OJ L 221, 8.8.1998, p. 23

² Article 3 of Directive 98/58/EC

³ http://ec.europa.eu/food/animals/docs/aw_eu_strategy_19012012_en.pdf

In this context, the EU reference centres for animal welfare, which are set up in the framework of the proposal on official controls⁴, could help support the Member States in their efforts to ensure the proper implementation of Union Law. One possibility I would like to mention is that these centres could provide capacity building and codes of good practice for the different species farmed within the EU. As this proposal is still under discussions with the European Parliament and the Council, it is not possible at this stage to provide any specific details or timeframe for these centres.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'B. Van Goethem', written over the printed name.

Bernard Van Goethem

⁴ COM(2013) 265 final.